Kingsbridge Urban District Council.

Annual Report

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health

FOR 1909.

KINGSBRIDGE:

J. R. GILL, PRINTER, "GAZETTE" OFFICE.

KINGSBRIDGE URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1909.

Gentlemen,—I have the honour to submit to you my 16th annual report, dealing with the health matters of your district for the year ending December 31st, 1909.

Following the suggestions contained in the memorandum issued by the Local Government Board for the guidance of Medical Officers of Health in the compilation of their annual reports, I will again commence by referring firstly to the Physical Features and General Characteristics of this district regarded from a health point of view.

The district consists essentially of two different areas—one a low-lying part stretching from the Estuary, and the other consisting of several small hills rising to a height of over 100 feet above sea level. The lower area comprises most of the older buildings in the town; and notably in Ebrington-street and Market-place the dwellings on the east side labour under the disadvantage of being built against the hillside, and as a consequence their gardens and back courts are in many instances at a higher level than the ground floors of the houses. This condition curtails the supply of sunlight and fresh air, which are the more needed in that many of the cottages have their ground floors paved with stone, all these conditions having a tendency to generate damp. The public thoroughfares in the district are fairly wide, and are well drained and maintained. There are practically no back-to-back dwellings; but in some of the courts, notably those off Fore-street, the approaches are narrow, and there is a marked deficiency of light in the lower rooms.

Occupation of Inhabitants.

The chief industries comprise a Steam Flour Mill, an Iron Foundry and Engineering Works, a Carriage Building Works, and a Brewery. Malting is also carried on to a small extent. The number of Malt Kilns is being gradually reduced, pointing to a decrease of that industry. With the exception of the above the occupation of the inhabitants is chiefly commercial, the town of Kingsbridge being the centre of an agricultural district.

House Accommodation: Adequacy and Fitness.

The accommodation in the various houses is generally adequate for the number of their inhabitants, and the dwellings have as a rule sufficient air space surrounding them.

Supervision over the erection of New Houses.

All new buildings in the district are erected under conditions complying with the bye-laws of your Authority, which have been duly approved and sanctioned by the Local Government Board.

Water Supply.

The supply from all your sources has been pure, and quite sufficient in amount for the whole district. All the sources have maintained their average amounts. The question, however, of the better distribution of the supplies to certain portions of your district has received the serious consideration of your authority during the year, and one of the schemes suggested by your surveyor, Mr. Monson, has been brought forward with a view to adopting a better distribution of available supplies of water, chiefly for the high levels, and your Council has invited tenders for carrying out the scheme.

Milk Supply.

The Milk Supply of the district is furnished mainly by dairies within your area, with two important exceptions.

The Dairies, Cowsheds, and Milkshops Order is in operation and the various premises, &c., have been periodically inspected, generally with satisfactory results.

Foods.

Working of the Food and Drugs Acts.—Your officers have received no instructions to obtain samples for analysis under the above Act.

Sewage and Drainage.

The district has a system of water-borne sewage, discharging into the Estuary some mile below the town. The various sewers are constantly under supervision, and an efficient method of flushing is in operation. House drains are subjected to periodic inspection, and, where defects are discovered, means for remedying the same are adopted. One of the chief of these defects is the want of flushing-cisterns in the closets. Now that a better distribution of the Water Supply is under process this defect should soon be remedied.

Pollution of Rivers and Streams.

These as far as I am aware are not polluted by sewage. The whole of the town drainage however discharges into the Tidal Estuary some mile below the main portion of the town, with the exception of certain properties abutting on the Quay, which are not connected with the main sewer, but discharge sewage directly into the tidal way between the town and main outfall. This defect has been represented by me to your Council during the year under consideration. After several Sanitary Committee Meetings and the consideration of their reports your Council has very rightly decided that the whole of these drains shall be connected with the main sewer.

The Removal and disposal of House Refuse, etc.

This has been satisfactorily carried out during the year. I would, however, again state that your bye-law with regard to the provision of properly covered sanitary utensils for the collection of house refuse, etc., is only being very partially complied with; as a consequence the pavements and gutters are often in the early mornings strewn with offensive and objectionable matter. One of the sites used for the deposit of town refuse, etc., situated near New Bridge, Bowcombe Creek, has latterly become very objectionable. I have met the Sanitary Committee on the spot and pointed out the unsatisfactory state of the present arrangement; as a result I understand your Council and the owner of the property are negotiating for an improvement of the conditions.

Nuisances.

These have been of a minor nature, and have been dealt with and remedied upon my reporting the same to your Council.

Over Crowding.

I have found it necessary to report one case of over crowding during the past year. This occurred in Trist's Court; a small 4-roomed house occupied by a family consisting of husband and wife and 7 children, the age of the eldest boy being 13 years and that of the eldest girl 16 years. An infant was included in the family. My report received immediate attention, and the insanitary condition was remedied.

Infectious Diseases.

As formerly reported, your means of dealing with infectious diseases consists of compulsory notification, investigation of cases of infection, and disinfection where

possible of the premises occupied. We still lack an isolation and infectious disease hospital (*vide* previous annual reports concerning this provision).

During the year I have received as Medical Officer of Health, 17 notifications of infectious diseases, viz.:—2 of Scarlet Fever; 2 of Erysipelas; 11 of Diphtheria; 1 of Typhoid Fever; 1 of Puerperal Fever. The total is the same as 1908, but while there has been a decrease of Scarlet Fever and Erysipelas, a very large increase of cases of Diphtheria has occurred. This, in my opinion, is the result of continued humidity occurring during the early part and latter end of the past 12 months. The case of Typhoid Fever was no doubt shell-fish borne, as the patient had eaten cockles gathered from the Estuary, contrary to notices and warnings issued against that practice.

Both cases of Scarlet Fever were of a mild type.

The two cases of Erysipelas (Facial) were of a mild form. Careful investigation failed to reveal any local insanitary conditions to account for the same.

The case of Puerperal Fever proved fatal in a female, aged 16 years, a native of West Africa and an inmate of the Workhouse, who was admitted from the Salcombe Urban District.

Your Surveyor has disinfected the dwellings, &c., in all cases where I deemed it necessary.

The free bacteriological examination introduced by the County Medical Officer has been of great assistance to me in determining the diagnosis of doubtful cases.

Tuberculosis Regulations, 1908.

Only one case has been notified under the above regulations during the past year, the same being an inmate of the Workhouse.

Incidence of Disease.

The cases of infectious disease were distributed over the various parts of the district. There has been no particular incidence of disease in any single locality.

Schools.

During the year I have not found it necessary to advise the closing of the Council Schools in your district. I have upon my various visits found all the sanitary arrangement satisfactory.

Inspection.

I have during the year made many systematic inspections of the district, irrespective of those called for by any particular outbreak of disease, and have found very few sanitary defects. Those upon which I have reported have received your attention, and have in due course been remedied.

Vital Statistics.

During the year there have been registered 53 births, giving a birth rate of 17·5 per 1,000 of population. Forty-eight deaths have occurred during the same period, giving a general death rate from all causes of 16·0 per 1,000. This is the same rate as 1908.

Deaths of children under one year of age number 5, being 9·4 per cent. of the total births and 10·4 per cent. of the total deaths registered. This compares favourably with the average for the last 10 years.

The percentage of deaths of children under 5 years of the total deaths is 12·5.

Of the total 48 deaths in the district, 27 occurred at or beyond the age of 65, 6 of these being over 80 and 16 being over 70 years.

Pulmonary Tuberculosis has accounted for 1 death, giving a mortality rate of 0·33 per 1,000 of population;

last year the rate was 0·99 per 1,000, and in 1907 it was 0·66.

Five deaths have been registered as due to cancer, making a total of 35 in the last 10 years.

There have been no deaths from Influenza, only 5 having occurred during the last 12 years.

There have been 3 deaths as a result of accident.

The birth rate of 17·5 is below the average for the past 10 years.

Operation of the Factories and Workshops Act, 1901.

Under section 132 of the Factory and Workshops Act, 1901, it is my duty as Medical Officer of Health to your Council to report as follows :—

A register of workshops is kept by your Authority, and I have personally, together with your Inspector, from time to time inspected the workshops and work places in the district, and as regards (a) general cleanliness, (b) air space, (c) ventilation, and (e) provision of suitable sanitary arrangements, have found them satisfactory; I have failed to find that any home work is carried on.

Appended herewith is the table provided by request of the Secretary of State, showing the number of inspections of factories, workshops, work-places, and home workers' premises made during the year, the number of defects found as regards nuisances under Public Health Acts, and offences against the Factory and Workshops Act, and other matters.

Union Workhouse.

Five children have been born in the Workhouse during the past year, giving a birth rate of 50·5 per 1,000 of its population. Four of these were illegitimate.

There was one death of an infant under one year, which was due to Premature Birth, the child being 14 days old.

The total deaths at all ages number 16, giving a death rate of 166·6 per 1,000; last year the rate was 138·6. In 1907 it was 147.

Of the total deaths, 3 were certified as Senile Decay, the average age being 83·33 years.

There has been one death in the "house" from Cancer, which is the same number as last year.

Only one case of infectious disease was notified as having occurred in the "house" during the year, that being a case of Puerperal Fever, which proved fatal.

There were no deaths from Pulmonary Tuberculosis in the "house" during the past year.

Public Mortuary.

In consequence of remarks and complaints made at an inquest held in your district a meeting of your Sanitary Committee was called to discuss the desirability of providing a Public Mortuary at the Workhouse; various plans and suggestions were put forward at the meeting, but owing to restrictions imposed by the Local Government Board it was found impracticable to carry out the same.

The general sanitary arrangements of the Workhouse are satisfactory.

Appended herewith are the tabular statements required by the Local Government Board, the contents of which I have furnished to the extent of the information in my possession.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM HY. WEBB,

Medical Officer of Health.

The Kingsbridge Urban District Council.